

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: February 8, 1976

Forwarded to:

Honorable John L. McLucas
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D. C. 20591

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-76-1 & 2

On August 30, 1975, Wien Air Alaska Flight 99, a Fairchild F-27B, crashed into a mountain while attempting to land at the village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska. The National Transportation Safety Board's investigation of the crash revealed that certain provisions of 14 CFR 139 are not being complied with. Further, the investigation disclosed that the runway at Gambell as well as those of many other certificated airports in Alaska did not have adequate visual identification markings.

When Flight 99 crashed, the airport's rotating light beacon had not been operating for several days; the failure had been reported to the State of Alaska. Similarly, several runway lights were burned out and some of the runway light supports were bent or otherwise damaged. Moreover, a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) had not been issued regarding the condition of these lighting systems. The Safety Board believes that the lack of these visual aids, especially the rotating light beacon, may have been a factor in the flightcrew's failure to locate the runway during repeated attempts to land.

The above conditions were permitted to exist, in spite of the provisions of 14 CFR 139.47, 139.57, and 139.87, which specify that airport lighting will be cleaned and replaced as necessary upon self-inspection, and that there must be a reporting system to insure prompt corrective action so that systems are maintained in operable conditions. Further, 14 CFR 139.69 requires that NOTAM's regarding these airport conditions be issued to air carrier users of the airport.

The Safety Board is aware that Gambell and many other certificated airports in Alaska are exempted from various portions of 14 CFR 139 which are considered to be impractical or not in the public interest. However, operation and maintenance of airport lights and the need for the issuance of NOTAM's were not exempted and are not considered impractical to implement or enforce.

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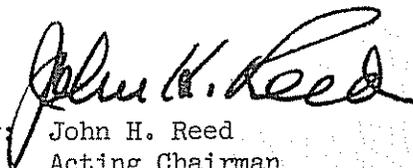
In addition to the poor condition of the airport lighting, the contrast between the runway at Gambell and its immediate surroundings is poor, especially when visibility is low. There are no runway centerline markings, threshold markings, touchdown zone markings, or other visual markings to aid in distinguishing the runway from surrounding terrain. Runway contrast is further reduced by snow in the winter months. These conditions also exist at other airports in Alaska which are certificated for air carrier operations.

The Safety Board is aware of programs, including those by the State of Alaska, to upgrade airport facilities, such as visual aids. We recognize that there are funding and seasonal logistics problems; however, we believe that some measures should be taken to raise the level of safety at these airports. For instance, runway centerline markings and other identifying markings, such as large wooden panels, brightly colored pylons, and VASI's would increase greatly the conspicuity of the runway environments at Gambell and at other Alaskan airports.

In view of the above, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

1. Insure that certificated airports in Alaska comply with the provisions of 14 CFR 139 -- specifically those provisions which require that airport lighting systems and similar equipment be maintained in an operable condition and that NOTAM's be issued regarding the conditions of such items, as needed. (Class II - Priority followup)
2. Expedite existing programs and initiate additional programs to install and improve facilities at certificated airports in Alaska so that the visual conspicuity of runway environments is improved. (Class II - Priority followup)

REED, Acting Chairman, McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.


By: John H. Reed
Acting Chairman



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